

## **In Support of HB6759 – Early Childhood**

To whom it may concern,

My name is Chris Badenhop and I am the School Readiness Liaison in New Britain, Wolcott and Chaplin, as well as an Education Consultant across Hartford County. **I am fully in support of HB 6759**, which is asking to utilize additional funding to raise early educator wages to parity with public school staff.

I have worked in Early Childhood programs for the last 23 years, and have been exposed to the disparities of low wages, for a critically important job...some would say even the most important one...of giving our youngest children the head start they need to be successful, as a K-12 student, and as an adult. Qualifications and responsibilities are increasing for our early childhood staff, yet their pay is not even close to what they deserve.

In our state-funded centers, programs are forced to keep up high staff qualifications, yet they are not able to receive enough funds to do this. They are tied to the very low reimbursement rate for School Readiness, for each of their children, which is just now seeing a possible small increase, since 2015. Minimum wage has increased above drastically (around 40%), while we are looking at a possible 17% increase in the reimbursement rate. Programs are closing left and right, as they are not able to sustain this. Each time a Program, or even a classroom closes, many children and families are not served. This needs to be a high focus for state-funded centers. Raise the rate higher, so that Programs can increase staff salaries and also be able to pay their overhead!

In addition to the reimbursement rates, it is said that they are receiving family fees and Care4Kids. However, in October of 2022 the family fee scale was changed by the state. No longer are Programs able to strive off of family fees, as they serve a majority of low-income families, with an average fee of \$0 - \$10. This is not sustainable, and while it benefits families for sure, our programs cannot count this as consistent income, for their bottom line. Additionally, our Programs are always pushing families to sign up for Care4Kids, but there is a very unfair reality here. Care4Kids paperwork is daunting, and overwhelming, both for Families and Programs. Additionally, as family fees have dropped, so has the need for families to feel that they need C4K. Now, you have Programs trying harder than ever to convince them to sign up, so that they can get funds to their program. Then, you add in the frustrating aspect of time in waiting for approvals and actually receiving payments.

We need to do better for our programs that are serving our next generation, with quality supports! Increase the opportunity for Early Childhood Programs to increase their staff wages, by giving them an overwhelming increase in the state-funded reimbursement rates!

Thank you,

Christopher Badenhop

School Readiness Liaison

Consolidated School District of New Britain